United Nations S/PV.8370

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8370th meeting

Thursday, 11 October 2018, 10.20 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Llorentty Soliz/Mrs. Cordova Soria	(Bolivia (Plurinational State of))
Members:	China	Mr. Yao Shaojun
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Ms. Edjang Mangue
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Tenya
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2018/882)

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2018/886)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2018/882)

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2018/886)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in today's meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Mr. Said Djinnit, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region.

Ms. Zerrougui and Mr. Djinnit will join today's meeting via video-teleconference from Kinshasa and Addis Ababa, respectively.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/882, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and document S/2018/886, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.

I now give the floor to Ms. Zerrougui.

Ms. Zerrougui (*spoke in French*): I thank the Security Council for this opportunity to discuss the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I would also like to thank the Council for its visit to Kinshasa this past weekend despite its busy agenda.

The visit was very useful for several reasons — for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congolese, but also for our partners and, lastly, for ourselves. Through discussions with the major actors involved in the ongoing political and electoral process, the visit provided a unique opportunity for Council members to observe at first-hand the situation on the ground, stakeholder engagement and the progress already made, as well as unresolved areas of disagreement. With two and a half months remaining before the national and provincial presidential and legislative elections, the electoral process is unfolding according to the electoral calendar. As Council members noted, decisive steps have been taken. The electoral law has been revised; the electoral register has been prepared and submitted for auditing; 21 candidates have been validated as candidates vying for the presidency, 15,505 as candidates for the National Assembly and 19,640 as candidates for the provincial assemblies. However, regrettably, although more than 50 per cent of voters are women, the percentage of female candidates is not more than 12 per cent of the total number of candidates in the legislative and provincial elections and there is only one female candidate in the presidential elections.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the constructive stance of political actors on all sides, who have been consistent in demonstrating their continued engagement in the electoral process, including following the decisions of the Constitutional Court, which resulted in some leaders of the political opposition being disqualified from standing as candidates in the presidential elections. At the same time, as Council members heard repeatedly in Kinshasa, the main opposition leaders have a strong mistrust of the process in general. Nonetheless, they have remained committed to it thus far. In particular, they are calling for doing away with the voting machines and for the electoral register to be updated. It is therefore essential that the main Congolese stakeholders reach consensus on those issues so as not to compromise the acceptance of election results. It is in that spirit that I am determined to continue my mission of good offices.

On 4 October, the Independent National Electoral Commission met with the 21 presidential candidates to discuss differences on critical aspects of organization of the elections. A technical committee to continue the dialogue on the subject was set up, with its first

meeting having been held yesterday. Regrettably, it ended with major differences of opinion. I welcome the Commission's awareness-raising effort and urge the joint forum to reach consensus on the points of contention. I also welcome the publication of the recommendations of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, which aim to clarify some of the concerns raised about the voting machines. With regard to the setting up and distribution of the voting machines and electoral material, the President of the Commission has assured us that the first set of voting machines was received last Friday at the port of Matadi. He added that delivery would continue in the coming weeks. The machines and other material must now be transported to the rest of the Congo, which, since the rainy season has just begun and given the relatively short deadline of 23 December, represents a major logistical challenge.

In the context of the implementation of the measures to ease tensions that were outlined in the political agreement of 31 December 2016, it should be noted that the public meeting organized on 29 September in Kinshasa by seven main opposition parties took place without challenges or major incidents. I welcome the peaceful nature of the event and the restraint shown by the demonstrators and the security services. We have also just learned that an agreement has been reached between the authorities and the opposition to hold a march on 13 October in Lubumbashi, which would be the first of its kind in the capital of Haut-Katanga province. Such signs are encouraging, and I will continue my good offices efforts in that regard to help create an environment that allows candidates to conduct their campaigns peacefully and in conditions that foster the sharing of ideas and opinions. Applying similar rules for all involved is a fundamental guarantee of the credibility of the entire process.

Ensuring the security of the elections is another prerequisite for credible and peaceful elections. It is important to ensure the security not only of the candidates for the upcoming elections, but also and above all of the environment in which the campaign and the actual polls. The task of securing the areas in which armed groups — who are increasingly using the political agenda for the benefit of their own interests — are stationed promises to be a difficult one. To that end, we recommend the establishment of electoral security mechanisms and strategic coordination of the various national defence and security entities.

(*spoke in English*)

As the Democratic Republic of the Congo moves towards elections, the complexity of the security situation and the continuing activities of armed groups in the east of the country continue to pose a major challenge to the protection of civilians. To cite just one recent alarming example, in the Petit Nord of North Kivu at least 14 people — including a woman and three children — were killed by alleged Nyatura combatants this week. With potential links to political and economic interests and a possibility of reprisal attacks, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) immediately deployed a standing combat deployment, together with civilian components, to prevent any further deterioration.

However, I am most concerned about current developments in Beni, in the Grand Nord of North Kivu. Presumed Allied Democratic Forces continue to stage near-daily attacks on civilians, the Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) and MONUSCO, increasingly close to the centre of Beni town. I wish to acknowledge the high toll borne by the FARDC in the context of this deteriorating situation. Despite the rate of attacks, our Intervention Brigade has taken an increasingly robust posture in recent months under exemplary leadership. They undertake proactive long-range patrols to ensure a protective environment and respond swiftly to alerts, in several recent cases repelling attacks as they are under way — most recently, just two days ago.

The growing frequency and proximity to Beni town of these attacks are, understandably, leading to frustration on the part of the local population. In this context, we are simultaneously stretched to respond to an outbreak of Ebola in the Beni health zone and surrounding areas, now including a town neighbouring Uganda. I am increasingly concerned about the trajectory of the disease. As of today, we have 194 confirmed or probable cases and 120 deaths.

While the response of the Congolese authorities and humanitarian partners, supported by MONUSCO, has been swift and exemplary, the security situation has rendered the response increasingly challenging. In some areas, the local population has shown mistrust towards Ebola responders, in one case attacking a convoy of health workers. Responders are currently grappling with the issue of simultaneously scaling up

response efforts both in Beni and in other nearby areas, while adapting their footprint to the deteriorating security situation.

In these cases, as in many places throughout the Democratic Republic of the Congo, our uniformed and civilian colleagues undertake significant efforts and risks on a daily basis to implement our mandate to protect civilians and provide security for humanitarian personnel. In addition to the efforts of our Intervention Brigade, I am equally encouraged to report that our broader force shows a willing mindset to deploy where it is most needed to ensure the protection of civilians, and to note the integration of our response efforts across our uniformed and civilian components and in support of humanitarian partners.

It is therefore unfortunate that, even within this concerning security context, we face challenges in ensuring that our military personnel are as well prepared as they should be and able to undertake operations within the full spectrum of the mandate. In recent weeks, we have faced increasing restrictions on the importation of arms, ammunition and other military equipment for several of our contingents, including our incoming rapidly deployable battalions.

Although we continue to engage on these issues with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I must unfortunately inform the Council that discussions have not yet yielded tangible results. This increasingly places our forces in a situation where they are inadequately resourced to ensure the security of our own personnel, protect civilians and ensure preparedness for contingency planning, as requested by the Council in the latest MONUSCO mandate.

(*spoke in French*)

Despite all these challenges, we remain optimistic and continue to make every effort, together with the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to ensure that this process is successful. The international community has sent a positive message by awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Dr. Denis Mukwege and, through him, to all women and girls of the Democratic Republic of the Congo who are victims of sexual violence. I take this opportunity to congratulate Dr. Mukwege on being awarded the Prize for his fight against sexual violence in times of war. This award honours him and the women and girls he has cared for, who pay a heavy price for the turmoil in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where rape is used as a weapon of war.

In South Kivu province, the cradle of the Panzi Foundation, as in the other provinces affected by insecurity, sexual violence continues to be perpetrated daily by parties to the conflict. We hope that this award to Dr. Mukwege and the Democratic Republic of the Congo will mark a turning point in obtaining assistance for the thousands of victims of sexual violence and in the fight against impunity against the perpetrators of such violence. MONUSCO continues to stand with them in this noble and indispensable struggle.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Zerrougui for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Djinnit.

Mr. Djinnit: I have the honour to present the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/886) on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Region, covering the period from 1 March to 31 August. I am pleased to do so just a few days after the ninth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, held in Kampala on 8 October.

In line with my road map, and working in close collaboration with the other guarantors of the framework agreement — the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), as well as the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the United Nations system and other partners — my colleagues in the Office and I have spared no effort to promote joint action aimed at advancing key commitments and the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. In that regard, our priority areas of work include the following.

The first concerns the neutralization of negative forces. Insecurity in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo persists as the result of the continued presence of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), the ex-Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) and some armed Burundian elements, in addition to a plethora of local armed groups in the same region. Allegations of cross-border interventions continue to be made. In addition to creating insecurity and causing the displacement of populations, the activities of those negative forces fuel mistrust among countries of the region and constitute a threat to regional peace and security.

With regard to the strengthening of the MONUSCO Force Intervention Brigade, as recommended by the Brazzaville meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism in October 2017, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and MONUSCO embarked on the implementation of the recommendations made by the United Nations-SADC joint assessment mission dispatched to the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo in April. For its part, my Office continued to promote regional and international support for related existing mechanisms, including the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Joint Intelligence Fusion Centre and the Joint Follow-up Mechanism on the ADF.

Meanwhile, with regard to the repatriation of disarmed combatants sustained efforts have been exerted through the reactivation of the relevant Follow-up Mechanism, which yielded some results. Following a series of field visits, which were attended by representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda, together with the guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, a total of 41 people have been repatriated to their countries of origin, including five former FDLR combatants and their 22 dependents, as well as 14 former M-23 combatants. While those visits might be modest, what is important is the fact that the Follow-up Mechanism has created a positive dynamic of cooperation among the countries concerned. It has also demonstrated that goodwill and cooperation by stakeholders lead to results on the ground. We will endeavour to foster the same spirit of collaboration, which is needed to address the long-standing challenge of negative forces in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The second priority area relates to efforts to strengthen the bonds of friendship and cooperation among the core countries of the region. As I reported in my previous briefing to the Council (see S/PV.8227), the workshop that had been jointly organized with the African Union on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, early this year in Addis Ababa, emphasized, inter alia, the need to address the persisting mistrust among Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda. Consequently, in my engagement with stakeholders in the region, I have encouraged initiatives to promote frank dialogue among leaders to resolve differences and address any issue that could jeopardize good relations and cooperation among them. In that regard, I am pleased to report that, based on my suggestion, the ninth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, during which President Museveni took over the chairmanship from President Sassou Nguesso, provided an opportunity for such conversation.

Despite the absence of the Heads of State of several core countries, discussions during the closed-door session revealed the deep concerns of member States about the local and regional implications of the negative forces as the main cause of mistrust among the core countries of the region. The meeting recognized the need for a new approach beyond the existing measures to enhance regional cooperation against the threat posed by the negative forces. It mandated President Museveni to convey to President Kabila the outcomes of the discussions at the meeting and to consult with the Chairperson of the African Union, the ICGLR and the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation on the next steps to take in joint engagement in that area. The Regional Oversight Mechanism also requested President Sassou Nguesso, as the Chairperson of the ICGLR and outgoing Chairperson of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, to consider taking initiatives to strengthen the bonds of friendship and cooperation among the core countries of the region, building on the previous initiatives that he has taken in that regard.

The third priority area concerns support for peaceful, credible and inclusive electoral and political processes in the region. Despite some positive developments, the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, the Central African Republic and South Sudan continues to contribute to instability in the region. Recognizing the importance of peaceful and credible elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for stability in the region as a whole, I have focused my efforts on mobilizing concerted regional and international support for the implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement. Throughout my consultations in the region, including with President Sassou Nguesso, as Chairperson of the Regional Oversight Mechanism and of the ICGLR; President Lourenço of Angola, as outgoing Chairperson of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation; and President Lungu of Zambia as incoming Chairperson of the SADC Organ, as well as with the leadership of the African Union Commission,

I encouraged sustained regional engagement in support of peaceful, credible and inclusive elections in line with the 31 December agreement.

I have also continued to emphasize the importance of addressing persisting differences between the Government and the opposition in Burundi through inclusive dialogue. As we await the outcome of the discussions of the fifth round of the inter-Burundian dialogue, it is important that the region continue to stand with the Burundian Government and people in support of inclusive, credible and peaceful elections in 2020, in full respect for the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi. The situation in those countries was also on the agenda of the recently concluded meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, which among other things called for inclusive electoral and political processes in the region, while noting that the exclusion of national stakeholders leads to perpetuating instability.

Enhanced commitment to inclusive dialogue and inclusive politics should also mean the greater participation of women, youth and civil society in peace and political processes in the Great Lakes region. That was our fourth priority during the period under review. In addition to continuing to support the preparation of a regional action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), my Office — in collaboration with the ICGLR, the African Union, FemWise-Africa and UN-Women — facilitated joint solidarity missions led by women leaders in the region to Burundi, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in July and August. In all the countries visited, they were able to engage stakeholders at all levels, including the respective Heads of State and legislative and executive authorities, and were successful in raising awareness of the importance of ensuring that women are included in political decision-making.

The key recommendation from those missions is to work towards achieving full gender parity and, in the interim, ensure a minimum of 30 per cent representation of women in peace and political processes, as well as in executive and legislative bodies, by 2023. That recommendation was endorsed by the ninth meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, following a statement delivered by Ms. Samba-Panza, former interim President of the Central African Republic, on behalf of the Advisory Board of the Women's Platform for the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. We will, of course, continue to pursue that initiative vigorously.

The fifth priority area covered efforts to address the root causes of conflicts in the region. In that regard, my Office focused on efforts to fight impunity and address the protracted displacement in the region, in addition to supporting initiatives to address the illicit exploitation and trade of natural resources. We continue to support the operationalization of the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network, including through the holding of its second meeting on 13 and 14 June in Dar es Salaam. I am pleased to report that the Network has now started to address specific cases of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

My Office, together with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the ICGLR and other partners, has also continued to promote durable solutions to protracted displacements pertaining to refugees from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, whose presence contributes to mistrust among countries in the region. In that regard, I am pleased to note the request of the Regional Oversight Mechanism in Kampala that President Museveni lead efforts on displacement in the region, including by hosting ministerial-level consultations later this year, to be jointly convened by my Office and the ICGLR. We expect that event to generate political will and commitments to making progress in this critical area.

Lastly, I would like to stress that the illegal exploitation and trade of natural resources remain factors for instability in the Great Lakes region and deprive the region and its people of much-needed sources of socioeconomic growth. During the period of the review, we continued to consult with the ICGLR on joint efforts in the implementation of the recommendations that were made at the workshop that we jointly convened in July 2016 in Nairobi.

Despite some progress, a lot remains to be done to fully achieve the objectives of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. Sustained economic development will depend on progress in establishing security in parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region as a whole, and in strengthening collaboration among the countries concerned in order to ensure that the resources of the countries of the region benefit the people of the region. Greater goodwill is needed to address the root causes of instability in the

region. My Office will of course continue to support the countries of the region in those efforts.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Djinnit for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council wishing to make statements.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, Mr. Said Djinnit, for their very informative briefings and their commitment.

We have just presented our report on the Security Council mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I will not dwell on that except to once again pay tribute to the work of Ms. Zerrougui and her teams, stress the historic opportunity represented by the elections of 23 December, and call on all Congolese actors to seize that opportunity and overcome their differences through dialogue in order to reach the widest possible consensus on the technical and political conditions for the organization of those elections. The entire Congolese population expects its leaders to hold credible, free and transparent elections in a peaceful climate. We hope that their calls will heeded.

The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Region was designed in 2013 to ensure peace and stability in the Great Lakes region, which had just experienced a series of conflicts. The framework agreement is specifically designed to address the common challenges facing the Great Lakes region and is an essential instrument for building confidence among the countries of the region. The inclusive agrement makes it possible to combine the efforts of a large number of actors, the countries of the region, relevant regional institutions and external partners towards the same purpose. It carries a long-term vision that encompasses all possible avenues to ensure the human and economic development of the region.

The agreement should work as a catalyst for action, but in our view it is not yet working optimally. There are several reasons for that. The region remains confronted by unresolved challenges, such as fragile electoral processes, massive population displacements caused by uncontrolled armed groups, incomplete reconciliation processes and the slow pace of justice. New threats have emerged, such as Ebola epidemics, the radicalization of youth and environmental damage related to the illegal exploitation of natural resources. The appropriate means to collectively address those challenges are not yet truly in place. I am thinking in particular of the lack of adequate regional legal and technical capacity in the field of police and judicial cooperation in the fight against trafficking and impunity. Finally, we are aware of the extent to which the lack of trust is both harmful and prejudicial. Rebuilding trust is therefore at the heart of our shared priorities.

France commends the outstanding work of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, Said Djinnit, who spares no effort in seeking all possible ways and means to overcome the challenges. Elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are on the horizon. We have just spoken about their importance to regional stability. The elections are also a historic opportunity for the entire region. They must offer an opportunity to the region, once the elections are over, to come together on a renewed regional road map that can identify new modes of interaction among neighbouring countries and contribute to overcoming the many challenges that remain.

France will remain faithful to the commitment made in 2013, in solidarity with the region. We have a common goal to help forge long-term regional stability. We stand ready to work closely with all countries of the region to serve that purpose and overcome the current challenges.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, Mr. Said Djinnit, for their insightful briefings. We also welcome the delegation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the Chamber.

At the outset, we would like to note that the recent mission of the Council provided an opportunity to receive first-hand information and a deeper understanding of the situation on the ground, and express support to the Government and people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We thank the Congolese national authorities and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) team for hosting

the Council's delegation, as well as the Department of Political Affairs, the Security Council Affairs Division, the Department of Safety and Security, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and others for arranging that visit so efficiently under difficult circumstances.

We pay tribute to the brave women and men of MONUSCO who risk their lives in hazardous conditions. It is one of the largest peacekeeping operations in history and has been serving the host country with courage and selflessness. We see Leila and Said's dedication and loyalty to their duty, which have received international recognition. They have complex mandates and have given us many lessons to learn. We note and appreciate the coordinated and important work they do. They have a large and complex agenda, and we see the different and unique ways in which they contribute.

As an observer at the African Union, we express our solidarity and associate ourselves with the statements of the African troika to be delivered today. I would like to make the following observations.

On the security front, we note with regret the renewed intercommunal violence and activities of armed groups, which exacerbate the already dire humanitarian situation, thereby leading to mass displacement of innocent Congolese people. We strongly condemn all attacks on the civilian population, peacekeepers and humanitarian and health workers and call on all local and foreign armed groups to lay down their weapons. We commend the work of MONUSCO in developing Mission-wide strategies to address the issue of attacks by armed groups and thereby implement the protection-through-projection strategy. The Mission's comprehensive approach to the protection of civilians, including the concept of operations of the Mission's force and police components, becomes even more important in preventing risks linked to violence intended to impede the upcoming elections. We also welcome MONUSCO's continued support to the peace processes on a provincial level, thereby addressing the underlying causes of intercommunal violence by advancing peace through awareness-raising campaigns with the full engagement of local leaders, women and youth.

On the counter-terrorism front, we would like to recall that, during our visit, President Kabila Kabange, Prime Minister Tshibala Nzenzhe and Vice-Prime Minister Mova Sakanyi stressed the importance of fighting terrorism and expressed regret that the members of the Council had not included the issue in their remarks. In particular, the Head of State underlined that terrorism has threatened the Democratic Republic of the Congo for 30 years now. Terrorists have extended their tentacles into the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Africa, Mozambique, Somalia, Ethiopia, Uganda and many other African countries. President Kabila emphasized, "We are losing our precious population, but we will continue to fight this evil". Kazakhstan therefore calls on Member States to support the Democratic Republic of the Congo in addressing the challenge posed by terrorism. We should recognize that this important country is a significant partner in our global effort aimed at the overall goal of achieving a world free of terrorism.

On the political front, we underline the progress made by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in preparing for elections according to the electoral calendar. This nationally owned process should be held with respect for the sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity and unity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We reiterate the importance of the implementation by all parties of the political agreement of 31 December 2016. We call on the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to continue implementing measures to create conditions conducive to holding credible and transparent elections with the meaningful participation of women in the process. Further efforts must be made by all key political actors to establish a constructive and inclusive inter-Congolese dialogue to achieve political progress and build confidence in the electoral process. We commend the committed determination of the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government to assume full responsibility for funding the elections. We therefore encourage all national authorities to continue cooperating with the Independent National Electoral Commission to provide the necessary resources.

We welcome the assurances of President Kabila, who, during the seventy-third session of the General Assembly (see A/73/PV.7) and during the Council's visit said that the elections would be held on time, that every necessary step will be taken to ensure peaceful and credible elections and that he takes it very seriously. In that regard, we underline that the support provided by the United Nations and the African Union is of crucial importance.

Although the elections are an important step in stabilizing the situation in the Democratic Republic

of the Congo, they are only a part of the solution. In that vein, we would like to stress the importance of further security-sector reforms, together with the decentralization and consolidation of State authority and the socioeconomic development of the country. We should realize that there is no development without security, but also that there is no security without development. We believe that in the foreseeable future, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General should have a designated deputy who would have oversight over, and be responsible for, development and the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In that vein, we would like to stress the importance of the threefold approach to addressing conflicts, which is intended to be a global model. Its components are as follows: building capacity for the interlinkages between security and development while promoting the SDGs; a revamped and innovative regional approach; and the One United Nations principle, based on the holistic modus operandi of our Organization. At the same time, as noted by Special Djinnit today and by Special Representative Zerrougui during our visit, we realize that good political will is needed to address the root causes.

On the humanitarian front, we note with regret that the existing situation, with a large number of internally displaced persons and refugees, against the backdrop of the underfunded humanitarian response plan, has been aggravated by the outbreak of the Ebola virus, which has caused more than 100 human deaths. We commend the efforts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo authorities, with the coordinated support of the United Nations and the African Union, to fight this epidemic. However, efforts to combat the Ebola virus are significantly hampered due to the unstable security situation in the affected zones.

On implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, we positively note the enhanced cooperation by the signatory countries on security, political and economic matters, as well as the fight against impunity through judicial cooperation. Our delegation raised this matter during the Council's meeting with Prime Minister Tshibala Nzenzhe. In that regard, we welcome the outcomes of the ninth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, held on 8 October in Kampala. We encourage the signatory countries to continue to increase their ownership of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and intensify their efforts to fully implement national and regional commitments. Regional institutions should also play a key role in the quest for lasting peace and stability in the Great Lakes region. The Framework remains a viable context and platform to help the countries and institutions of the region to achieve peace and stability in line with the objectives of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region, Agenda 2063 of the African Union and the Silencing the Guns by 2020 initiative.

Lastly, we once again express our gratitude for the visit, which enabled us to see at first hand what is happening in the country and what has been done to achieve peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That is our absolute priority, and we will continue to extend our support.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I thank Ms. Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Mr. Djinnit, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, for their briefings today. We deeply appreciate their updates, especially in these final two months before elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Following the Security Council's trip to Kinshasa, our focus remains on the state of elections preparations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We are particularly glad that the Security Council met with the President of the Independent National Electoral Commission, who had not been able to join us for the August Council briefing (see S/PV.8331). We agree with the Electoral Commission officials that another electoral delay is not acceptable and appreciate their focus on maintaining the 23 December date. The Congolese people have already waited two years to cast their votes.

With that in mind, we will continue to support the efforts of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to establish contingency plans to distribute voting materials if the Congolese Government makes a last-minute request. We encourage MONUSCO to be transparent with the Congolese Government regarding deadlines for requesting that assistance. However, we recall that it is not MONUSCO's responsibility to organize Congolese elections, it is the responsibility of the Independent National Electoral Commission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Although the

Commission has had an extra two years to organize this election, we remain deeply concerned about the specific choices that it has made, in that they are likely to lead to widespread problems on election day.

We believe that Congolese officials intend to hold elections on 23 December, but we are not the people who need to be convinced. The Congolese people need to know that they will have the chance to exercise their vote in a credible election. Now is the time to build that confidence. End the detention of political prisoners and implement fully the December 2016 agreement. Develop a logistics plan to deliver elections materials in time. Release the voter registry in an electronic, searchable format. Build consensus around the electronic voting machines and develop a back-up procedure to ensure voters can still vote even if the machines malfunction or fail to be delivered to all voting stations. Train sufficient poll workers on voting equipment and processes. Those are actions that the Congolese Government, and the Commission in particular, could take today to address the concerns of Congolese voters.

The goal for 23 December 2018 is free, fair and credible elections. One way to safeguard that is through elections observers. We encourage the Independent National Electoral Commission to speedily begin to welcome and accredit election observers in coordination with the African Union, the Southern African Development Community and Congolese civil society.

Two weeks ago, on the floor of the General Assembly, President Kabila Kabange called for the end of MONUSCO (see A/73/PV.7). We share that goal, but our focus is on the execution and on the timing. As the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/882) documents, MONUSCO is essential for civilian protection in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Armed groups continue their attacks and human rights violations, especially against civilians in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. We recognize the efforts of the United Nations to repatriate or relocate former combatants from Rwanda and South Sudan, even as we remain deeply concerned about attacks by the Allied Democratic Forces, which appear to be increasing in frequency and lethality. In North Kivu and Ituri, MONUSCO is providing life-saving logistic support to the Ebola response, protecting convoys and ensuring that humanitarian workers can operate safely in difficult conditions. That health crisis will require our full attention and ingenuity to halt Ebola's spread.

When the time is right, we will be the first to celebrate MONUSCO's closure, as called for by President Kabila Kabange in his address, but today it is too soon to celebrate.

Finally, we note that Congolese authorities have started the trial on the murder of two United Nations experts, Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalán, who were killed while investigating human rights violations in the Kasais. We want to remind the Congolese authorities of the importance of a thorough investigation and fair trial without the pressure of artificial timelines. No one wants to see innocent people convicted for a murder they did not commit or those guilty walk free. We encourage the Secretary-General to renew the Follow-up Mechanism to accompany Congolese authorities in seeking justice for Michael and Zaida.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui and Special Envoy Djinnit for their briefings. I extend my gratitude to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the co-leads France, Equatorial Guinea and Bolivia, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the United Nations country team for organizing our visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo last week. The visit, although limited to Kinshasa, offered very useful impressions of the progress on the electoral calendar, but also on remaining challenges, the human rights situation, humanitarian needs and security.

Today I will address the elections, the overall security and human rights situation and the role of the United Nations, and will share a few thoughts on the way forward.

When Sweden joined the Council in January 2017, a major crisis had just been avoided by the signing of the 31 December 2016 agreement. The agreement provides the road map towards peaceful, credible and inclusive elections on 23 December — elections that are indeed critical to peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in the broader region.

Those elections are now less than three months away. Important progress has made in recent months. We welcome the important preparatory steps that have been taken. Efforts are now urgently needed to implement all parts of the agreement, including the confidence-building measures. The opening of equal democratic space for all is essential, including the

freedom of assembly and of expression. As in any other country, the Government has a special role to play in ensuring the fulfilment of those measures. Everyone must be able to campaign freely and peacefully, political prisoners must be released, and the political rights of all must be safeguarded.

Women's full and equal participation in the elections is vital and must be supported and encouraged. Unfortunately, the conditions for women's participation still look dire. Much more needs to be done to mitigate the political, economic, security and social impediments to women's participation on equal terms.

The Independent National Electoral Commission has a critical role to play. As preparations proceed, there is need for more proactive outreach and increased public information about the electoral process. That includes clear guidance on the functioning of the voter registry and the voting machines. Legitimate concerns and recommendations on how to improve those processes should be taken on board and considered in a transparent and collaborative fashion. Independent election observers would bring further credibility to the electoral process and help to bring added trust and confidence. We welcome the intention of the Southern African Development Community to provide support with an observation mission, and encourage the Democratic Republic of the Congo to also engage with other national, regional and international actors. The continued readiness of MONUSCO to assist with technical and logistical support is welcomed.

The ambitious efforts of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo (CENCO) to train and deploy national observers should be encouraged and supported. Further efforts are clearly needed to build confidence and for the elections to be widely accepted among the Congolese people. Good offices functions by CENCO or the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, as needed, are important in that regard. Any concerns about the conduct of the elections should be addressed peacefully and through established channels and institutions, and be duly considered in accordance with international standards.

Continued regional leadership and international unity are key. The recent discussions in Kampala on advancing the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, as referred to by Special Envoy Djinnit, highlight the importance of regional coordination, including for the conduct of credible elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The joint statement of the Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council earlier in July illustrated international unity on the need for those elections to be credible.

We condemn continued human rights violations by armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We are especially concerned about the escalation of violence and attacks in and around Beni, in the Kasai region and most recently in the mining town of Rubaya. Sexual and gender-based violence is widespread. The destabilizing activities of armed groups are of grave concern.

It is important never to let violence and human rights violations become the new normal, and all parties are responsible for that. The Government has a particular responsibility to address violence and abuse, including sexual and gender-based violence. The high percentage of violations that are attributed to State agents is of great concern. Fighting impunity is key. We call on the Government to continue to strengthen efforts to ensure that those responsible for violations are held to account.

The fragile security situation has also had a negative impact on the Ebola response, as well as other humanitarian efforts. We call for a period of tranquillity to allow for addressing the threat of Ebola. More funding is needed for the overall humanitarian response and, not least, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access must be granted.

We commend the work of MONUSCO, which operates under difficult conditions and with an extensive mandate. We appreciate the more proactive posture of the Mission, which has enabled better protection for both civilians and peacekeepers. With limited resources, MONUSCO has been able to deliver important results. We fully support the mandate of the Mission and the continued good offices of Special Representative Leila Zerrougui. It is important that MONUSCO be prepared to manage violence and insecurity in connection with the elections, including in the post-election context. Continued efforts for the transfer of capacity can, we hope, be explored after the elections.

The United Nations country team also deserves credit for its important work, exploring a broader peace and development agenda amid honourable efforts to provide humanitarian assistance in difficult circumstances. In an ideal scenario, venues will open up after the elections

for a stronger development focus, based on a credible Government plan focusing on the long-term needs of the population for socioeconomic development, based on the Sustainable Development Goals.

I want to take this opportunity to note some new dynamics in the trial and investigation into the murders of United Nations experts Zaida Catalán and Michael Sharp, which were also raised by my American colleague. We underscore the continued need for the Democratic Republic of the Congo authorities to fully cooperate with the follow-on mechanism, initiated by the Secretary-General and led by Mr. Robert Petit, as well as national investigations. It is also important that the national investigations take note of recommendations made by the mechanism, especially in terms of conducting thorough and legally robust investigations without artificial timelines for its completion. We welcome the anticipated extension of the mechanism. The Swedish investigation is still experiencing issues relating to cooperation with Democratic Republic of the Congo authorities. We would also like to acknowledge the ongoing efforts of the Secretariat to improve the overall security and conditions for United Nations experts, an issue that requires the Council's further attention and support.

Just as we landed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we were met with the announcement that Dr. Mukwege and the Panzi hospital had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. That is very significant recognition for all women affected by sexual abuse, and it has shed light on the tremendous suffering that conflict-related sexual violence imposes on victims, their families and entire societies in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere. Let us hope that the prize will help turn the corner towards putting an end once and for all to that most horrendous of crimes and that women will be empowered to play a full and equal part in the future of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The Congolese people have suffered for too long. The upcoming elections and the subsequent democratic transfer of power will offer an opportunity for renewed momentum in putting the interests of the people first. Credible and peaceful elections are necessary but not sufficient on the road ahead for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Moving from constant emergency mode and humanitarian crisis towards real development based on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the enjoyment by all Congolese of their fundamental rights is necessary. All national stakeholders, countries in the region and the international community must now focus efforts on ensuring that the opportunity to change the trajectory in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is seized.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands) (*spoke in French*): Last week's visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo made possible a better analysis of the challenges facing the country in the run-up to the elections. I would like to thank the representatives of France, Bolivia and Equatorial Guinea for their preparatory work and their very thorough briefings this morning. I would also like to thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui and Mr. Said Djinnit for their briefings just now. The Kingdom of the Netherlands continues to provide them with its full support.

Today I would like to dwell on three points. First, I would like to share some of the highlights of the Security Council's visit. Secondly, I will emphasize the importance of confidence-building in the final phase of the election preparations. Lastly, I will address the role of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in relation to Action for Peacekeeping.

On my first point, I would like to share some reflections on our recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I thank the Congolese authorities and MONUSCO for their hospitality. Our various interviews revealed to what extent the political differences among the different parties affect people's lives. Our meeting with the female candidates particularly struck me. They were bursting with positive energy and had the clear will to improve Congo's future.

During our visit, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Dr. Denis Mukwege. The Kingdom of the Netherlands admires his commitment to the health and the dignity of women in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That honour sends a political signal to all countries of the world and calls on them to continue the fight against sexual violence in conflict areas. We also welcome President Kabila Kabange's reaffirmation of that message of zero tolerance for sexual violence. We look forward to seeing its further implementation.

My second point concerns the two months remaining to prepare the elections. Several important steps have been taken to ensure the holding of the elections on 23 December. I am thinking of the training of national observers and the provision by the authorities of the necessary logistical materiel. As

pointed out by our French colleague, the outstanding problem can be summed up in one word — trust. There are deep political divisions. We call on all actors to strengthen their cooperation so as to reach agreement on outstanding issues. We call on the Independent National Electoral Commission to increase transparency and openness. We underline the need for all political parties to be able to campaign safely. We call for the full implementation of the New Year's Eve agreement, in particular the opening of political space. We encourage the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to invite independent observers. Such confidence-building measures are crucial to the credibility of the elections.

My third point concerns MONUSCO. I recall that MONUSCO is ready to provide logistical support to the electoral process. However, it is important to look beyond that deadline because the elections will not remove the root causes of the conflict, which still affects millions of civilians in eastern Congo.

During our visit, I was impressed by MONUSCO's efforts towards Action for Peacekeeping. Last March, our Prime Minister, Mark Rutte, helped to launch that initiative here in the Security Council in support of Secretary-General Guterres (see S/PV.8218). MONUSCO has shown itself able to act more proactively and more flexibly. We commend the Force Commander for his commitment to Action for Peacekeeping. His goal is to save lives, not to count the bodies. At the same time, I noted the need for resources to implement the new protection-through-projection strategy. That includes air assets, night-vision goggles and intelligence. The strategy will need to be evaluated in order to draw lessons for other peacekeeping operations.

It is also imperative that MONUSCO rapidly have access to all the materiel that has not yet entered Congolese territory. The primary task of the Mission remains the protection of civilians. The violence perpetrated by the Allied Democratic Forces in the vicinity of Beni — an area affected by the Ebola virus — once again illustrates the importance of that task.

The visit clearly showed me the need for a realistic mandate and for MONUSCO to focus on the key tasks. That clearly demonstrates that any exit strategy for MONUSCO should be considered only with the utmost caution, taking into account the needs of Congolese civilians. Moreover, a possible early reduction of MONUSCO troops risks having significant consequences beyond the national territory.

In the context of regional aspects, the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region remains highly relevant, as the ninth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism emphasized. Only the political will of the stakeholders will be able to fully realize the potential of the Framework.

In conclusion, the time remaining before the elections on 23 December will be crucial. All parties must step up their efforts to ensure free, credible and peaceful elections that enhance the prospects for the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They can count on our support. For the future of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we must maintain the unity of the Security Council.

Mr. Tenya (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the convening of this meeting and the important briefings by Special Representative Leila Zerrougui and Special Envoy Said Djinnit. I would like to very briefly join the Permanent Representative of Sweden in expressing thanks to the leader of the Security Council mission, the Permanent Representative of France, and to the co-leaders, the Permanent Representatives of Bolivia and Equatorial Guinea, as well as the members of the Council secretariat, for their outstanding conduct of the mission.

We would like to start by emphasizing the importance of the Democratic Republic of the Congo holding on 23 December free, transparent, inclusive and credible elections, allowing for the establishment of a new Government that will be called on to address the serious challenges that the country faces. In that regard, we wish to acknowledge the efforts undertaken by the Government, in particular the firm commitment that the Head of State himself, President Kabila Kabange, expressed to us last week, for the success of the December elections. We also highlight the work of the Independent National Electoral Commission in complying with the electoral calendar. We reiterate the importance of the international community's support in that process, while respecting the principle of sovereignty.

As has been mentioned, the members of the Security Council had an opportunity to get close to the situation and interact with Congolese authorities

and civil society, to whom we are grateful for their generous hospitality.

We take due note of the concerns voiced by the opposition with regard to the use of voting machines. We are confident that it will be possible to reach an understanding. We also hope that there will be adequate training on their use so that the Congolese people can express their will without major setbacks. Beyond the technical and logistical discussions on the process, we consider essential that a healthy debate and exchange of ideas and proposals among the candidates be generated so that Congolese citizens are well informed when choosing their future leaders.

We also express our concern about the arbitrary arrests of members of the opposition and representatives of civil society, which are contrary to the democratic climate in which elections must be conducted. In that regard, we underline the need to fully implement the confidence-building measures set forth in the 31 December 2016 political agreement.

We also stress the important supporting role of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the African Union and subregional organizations, as well as that of neighbouring countries, in ensuring that the electoral process can become a turning point in the building of sustainable peace in the country.

With regard to the security situation, we deplore the continuing attacks by armed groups against the civilian population in the east of the country and the inter-ethnic violence in the South Kivu region, as well as the theft of weapons from the armed forces by militias. We consider it essential that the armed forces, MONUSCO and the Intervention Brigade continue to work together to more effectively protect the civilian population, especially from Allied Democratic Forces attacks in the North Kivu region.

We would also like to underline the organization of workshops to determine the humanitarian needs in the country, conducted by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We believe that initiative will foster cooperation between Congolese authorities and humanitarian agencies at the national and sub-national levels.

We also welcome MONUSCO's quite committed and steadfast work in the area of human rights, in particular in the implementation of the road map to secure the release of children recruited by armed groups, and we stress the need to bring those responsible to justice. Along the same lines, we welcome the community violence-reduction projects implemented in the east of the country, which have given ex-combatants access to jobs and reduced the risk of young people being recruited by militias.

Finally, we express our deep concern about the new outbreak of the Ebola virus, and regret that it has cost the lives of 120 people and threatens almost 200 other affected people, at the very least. We highlight and support the work of the World Health Organization and the United Nations to tackle the situation in coordination with the Government. However, we note with alarm that the virus is spreading in areas affected by constant attacks by armed groups. That obviously hampers prevention efforts for a timely and comprehensive response to the threat posed by the virus. The MONUSCO staff and the health personnel deployed to those areas deserve our admiration and support.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui and Special Envoy Said Djinnit for their comprehensive and informative briefings, as well as for their continued efforts and capable leadership in the field.

We note the significant progress that has been made in the preparations for the holding of the 23 December elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We appreciate the efforts of the Independent National Electoral Commission to ensure the achievement of key milestones in the electoral process. In that regard, the publication of the final list of candidates for the presidential, national and provincial legislative elections is encouraging. We very much welcome the decision of President Joseph Kabila Kabange not to run for office, in line with the Congolese Constitution.

The Security Council visit to Kinshasa was indeed very useful in witnessing the ongoing preparations for the upcoming elections in December and interacting with all the relevant stakeholders. We thank the co-leads for their briefing on the series of important discussions we had during the visit.

Despite the progress made thus far, many challenges persist. We observed a lack of trust in the electoral process, which greatly underscores the need to implement the confidence-building measures

identified in the 31 December 2016 political agreement. All Congolese political stakeholders need to engage positively and constructively, with full respect for the Congolese Constitution and its institutions, to create the necessary conditions for the holding of free, fair, credible and peaceful elections.

We observed at first-hand what the United Nations is doing on the ground to support the electoral process and witnessed the readiness of MONUSCO to provide technical and logistical support to the Electoral Commission. We note that the Mission is carrying out its mandate under difficult circumstances and needs all the support it can get from the Council.

The role that MONUSCO has played in Ebola response efforts, which include operations to address the persistent threat of armed groups and to protect humanitarian spaces, is commendable.

The continued activities of negative forces operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region remains a matter of concern. We note the outcome of the ninth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, held in Kampala a few days ago, which, among other things, stressed the need for a new approach that goes beyond existing measures to ensure greater regional cooperation in fully neutralizing those elements without delay.

Five years after the signing of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, the Great Lakes region continues to face enormous challenges. That there is need to do more to build trust among countries of the region is very clear. We hope greater efforts will be made in that regard, without which no meaningful progress can be made in realizing the objectives set out in the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. The Security Council should support and encourage the countries of the region to build trust.

As we discussed last week, the Ebola situation is quite worrisome. We appreciate the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and all other international partners that are making every possible effort to address and contain the spread of the disease. The World Health Organization has already alerted us about the possible risk of the virus spreading to other parts of the country and the wider region, with enormous implications for regional peace and stability. That is why there is a need for greater mobilization of international support for the ongoing response efforts to contain the spread of the disease. In that context, we are planning to propose a draft resolution that will build on the important discussion we had last week. We look forward to engaging with all Council members on the matter over the coming days.

Ms. Edjang Mangue (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui and Special Envoy Djinnit for their leadership, dedication and outstanding briefings on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region.

First and foremost, we would like to express our concern for, and encouragement to, our sisterly country the Democratic Republic of the Congo following the most recent Ebola outbreak.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea attaches the utmost importance to the events unfolding in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Given our strong bonds of sisterhood and friendship and the fact that we are members of the same subregional institutions, we view its problems as though they were our own. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has made efforts to become stable and has embarked upon a process of reconstruction. We commend those efforts. We understand that the country is at a key juncture in its history, and we are hopeful about the situation.

Positive developments ahead of the upcoming trio of presidential, legislative and provincial elections on 23 December are key to future lasting stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that regard, it is worth noting that considerable progress has been made in the electoral process with regard to preparations, as stipulated by the electoral calendar, the publication of the electoral roll in line with legislation, the easing of political tensions and dialogue among all parties on the use of voting machines, among other things. It is for those reasons that we encourage the Government and the Independent National Electoral Commission, political parties, civil society and all the national stakeholders concerned to continue strengthening the process so as to ensure that all citizens can exercise their right to vote in the best conditions, while raising people's awareness about how to exercise that right.

We encourage all Congolese actors to create the conditions necessary for the holding of peaceful elections and do everything possible to ensure that the ballot on 23 December is credible, transparent, inclusive

and held in a calm environment. Full compliance with the Saint-Sylvestre agreement of 31 December 2016 is the best guarantee for the holding of satisfactory elections and for a subsequent peaceful transfer of power. Those are key aspects in ensuring the legitimacy of elected authorities and, in particular, the stability of the country and the region. Easing political tensions, implementing the recommendations of the International Organization of la Francophonie and ensuring dialogue among all parties on the use of voting machines are also key factors. In that regard, we welcome as a positive step the meeting of the various political parties that took place on 29 September.

One of the lessons learned from the most recent visit by the Security Council to the Democratic Republic of the Congo is that for upcoming elections to be a resounding success and viewed as a step forward for the Congolese people, all possible post-election scenarios must be analysed with a view to taking measures that guarantee the building and strengthening of lasting peace in the country.

We welcome the public statement on the state of the nation made by President Joseph Kabila Kabange on 19 July before a joint session of the National Assembly and the Senate. The President reiterated his intention to respect the country's Constitution and underscored that his Government remained firmly committed to fully shouldering its responsibility to fund the presidential, legislative and provincial elections. He also stressed that he did not intend to stand as a candidate in the presidential elections. In a legitimate exercise of sovereignty and independence, the President's announcement illustrates his determination and commitment to the country. The international community must continue to support the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in its electoral process, while respecting the principle of non-interference in its internal affairs, as well as its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

With regard to the security situation, challenges remain in the east of the country, as demonstrated by violence between the Allied Democratic Forces and the Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo, in particular around Beni. We therefore encourage the Government to continue taking measures to address the security situation and the activities of armed groups in various provinces and protect civilians, with the support of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). We also urge all the parties concerned to act responsibly so as to promote social cohesion, in particular during the electoral period, as well as a cessation of hostilities by the armed groups. We also encourage the Congolese authorities to remain committed to ensuring that those responsible for crimes and gross violations of human rights and humanitarian law are brought to justice.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea condemns the pillaging and exploitation in conflict zones and the transfer of raw materials to other regions, which serve to underscore the double standards observed during conflicts and, at times, explain the reasons for them. Without a definitive solution to the problem, the possibilities for successfully resolving the issue of peace and security in the region will remain distant. The illegal exploitation of natural resources in the Democratic Republic of the Congo produces considerable economic benefits that do not go to benefit the Congolese people, but other actors instead. It is therefore important to take steps to put an end to that situation and, if necessary, impose sanctions on those who do not comply with international standards in that regard.

Equatorial Guinea believes that the assistance provided by various international organizations, including the United Nations, in close collaboration with the European Union, the African Union, countries of the region, the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Economic Community of Central African States, is essential in the quest for a lasting solution to the political situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. To that end, Equatorial Guinea would like to echo the call made by the African Union Peace and Security Council to establish a coordination mechanism that includes all of the actors I mentioned, with a view to ensuring effective and consistent support for the country. Equatorial Guinea also calls for the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, signed on 24 February 2013 in Addis Ababa. We urge its signatories and guarantors to take the necessary steps and redouble efforts to ensure its full and effective implementation. It is therefore crucial to neutralize the armed groups operating in the east of the country.

The recent and well-deserved recognition of the excellent work of Dr. Denis Mukwege and his colleagues, at both the Panzi Hospital and Foundation,

as well as the resilience of the victims of sexual violence in conflict situations in the Congo, is an example of the commitment and personal investment of Congolese brothers and sisters in the development of their country and in the well-being of its people. It is that spirit of triumph and solidarity that we need on the continent, and it must be encouraged.

Let me therefore conclude by inviting all the parties involved in the process to continue along the path of internal inclusive dialogue and avoid any violent acts that could lead to a disruption of the process. We also take this opportunity to call on the international community to fully support the Government, MONUSCO, the Independent National Electoral Commission and other parties directly concerned in the process to foster confidence-building measures so as to ensure an environment that is conducive to the holding of peaceful elections, commitment to a road map and the peaceful transfer of power in an environment of peace and national harmony.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting. We would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, Mr. Said Djinnit, for their valuable briefings.

With regard to the visit by the members of the Security Council to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which took place from 5 to 7 October, we would like to thank the Congolese Government for having facilitated the organization of the delegation's visit from our arrival in the capital, Kinshasa, until our departure. We also thank Ms. Zerrougui and all MONUSCO staff, as well as the Security Council secretariat. Of course, we also thank the delegations of Bolivia, France and Equatorial Guinea for their outstanding arrangements and efforts to make the visit a success, with a positive effect on our discussion of the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I would like to address three aspects in my statement.

First, on the political front, our discussion today coincides with the beginning of the countdown to the most important event for the Congolese people, namely, the presidential and legislative elections at the national and provincial levels to be held in approximately two months' time. During our visit, we took note of the determination and commitment of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the electoral timetable, as well as to holding the elections on 23 December, which is the date specified in the electoral calendar. We hope that the election process will put an end to the political tensions the country has been experiencing, and that the elections will be free, transparent, inclusive of all segments of the Congolese people and credible, as well as in line with the Congolese Constitution and legislation. Confidence-building measures must be ensured with the participation of all Congolese political parties in the elections, as stipulated in the political agreement of 31 December 2016.

We also welcome the efforts being made by the Congolese Government and the Independent National Electoral Commission to ensure the achievement of key milestones in the electoral process, including the publication of the final list of presidential and legislative candidates at the national and provincial levels.

We underscore the importance of reaching consensus on the outstanding contentious issues, such as on the use of electronic voting machines, the electoral roll and the financing of the electoral process — which the Government has committed to covering it in its entirety — as well as of MONUSCO's provision of technical and logistical support in the run-up to the elections.

Secondly, on the humanitarian situation, the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is very worrisome. As set out in the Secretary-General's latest report, published on 1 October (S/2018/882), the statistics pertaining to refugees, displaced persons and people in need of urgent humanitarian assistance are a source of concern. That is all the more so following the Ministry of Health's declaration on 1 August that an Ebola outbreak had begun, which to date has killed more than 120 people. The Congolese Government and the international community must cooperate in order to meet humanitarian needs and alleviate the suffering of the people. In that regard, we commend MONUSCO and the World Health Organization for their efforts and prompt response to counter the disease.

Thirdly, on the security situation, the ongoing violence and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular in the eastern part of the country, continue to escalate militarily, to varying levels

of intensity, in various areas, which is also a source of concern. Military attacks directly jeopardize unarmed civilian lives and exhaust the natural and human resources of the country. In that respect, we commend the enormous efforts by MONUSCO and its personnel to combat military attacks and protect civilians. We call on all the parties responsible for the military clashes to halt them in order to save unarmed civilian lives and establish the desired security and stability.

In conclusion, we underline our full support for the efforts made by Special Envoy Djinnit and for the initiatives of the African Union, the Southern African Development Community and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region in following up on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. The aim is to address the security, political and humanitarian challenges at the national and regional levels and to end the conflicts and instability that have existed for so long. We hope that the African Union will be able to achieve its goal of putting an end to all conflicts by 2020, in accordance with the Framework Agreement.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): Let me begin by thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui for both her briefing and the excellent assistance and advice she gave the Security Council during our visit last week. I would also like to thank Special Envoy Djinnit for his briefing and for the work he has been doing in the region to support the implementation of the 31 December agreement.

There are only 73 days left before the elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, elections that will be crucial for both the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the prospects for peace and stability in the Great Lakes region. If successful, as the Ambassador from France has said, it will prove to be a historic turning point: the first peaceful democratic transfer of power in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's history. It will serve as a foundation on which to build peace, stability and prosperity.

I believe it is important that we, as the Council, recognize the progress that has been made in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular the publication of the list of candidates for presidential, provincial and parliamentary elections and the fact that all parties so far have stuck to the electoral timetable that has been set out. But if I personally took one thing away from the Council's visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it is that there is still much work to be done. For elections to be credible, there needs to be an environment conducive to holding free and fair elections. But there remains distrust among opposition figures, civil society and the Government, and many Congolese clearly feel that the conditions for credible elections do not currently exist. There remain a number of unresolved issues.

First, with regard to the electronic voting machines, Special Representative Zerrougui mentioned the Westminster Foundation for Democracy study into the machines and the recommendations it put forward. We would urge the Independent National Electoral Commission to implement those recommendations on how to improve the machines and encourage it to undertake outreach with the opposition and civil society on how the machines work and how the Commission is going about implementing the recommendations. We would also encourage the opposition to engage constructively with the Electoral Commission when it comes to making the best of the electronic voting machines.

Secondly, there are questions around voter registration. We urge the Independent National Electoral Commission to implement the recommendations of the International Organization of la Francophonie.

Thirdly, as the Ambassador of Kuwait highlighted, the 31 December agreement contained a number of confidence-building measures, especially with regard to the freedom of assembly and expression. We very much welcome President Kabila Kabange's commitment to the Council that his Government would allow peaceful rallies to take place in the run-up to the election.

Fourthly, we believe that independent election observation would help build trust and confidence within the Democratic Republic fo the Congo. We welcome President Kabila Kabange's commitment to facilitate observers from the region.

Fifthly, and finally, I do not think that anyone underestimates the logistical challenges of organizing three sets of elections on the same day. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has offered its support to the Government, and we very much hope that the Government will take MONUSCO up on that offer.

MONUSCO continues to play a vital role in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, both in supporting elections and in protecting civilians. The United Kingdom is deeply concerned about the deteriorating security situation in North Kivu, South Kivu, Kasai and Tanganyika and the impact that that has on the civilian population. That is a very worrying trend, and we support Secretary-General's call for the authorities, with the support of MONUSCO, to take the necessary steps to protect civilians. We are also concerned about the increase in reported human rights abuses and violations from July to August, as compared to the same period last year. As the Ambassador of Sweden said, it is particularly concerning that 59 per cent of the violations across the country were perpetrated by State agents. We call on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to spare no effort in bringing those responsible for such abuses and violations to account.

We remain very concerned about the Ebola outbreak in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We welcome the leadership of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in cooperation with the World Health Organization and MONUSCO, in responding swiftly to the Ebola outbreak. We remain ready to provide further support.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the importance of the next 73 days. We have come a long way, but much remains to be done. The Council, together with the region, must remain engaged and supportive to ensure that credible, transparent elections lead to a peaceful transfer of power.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), for her excellent briefing. We also thank Mr. Said Djinnit, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, for his comprehensive briefing. I should also like to join others in commending the representatives of France, Bolivia, Equatorial Guinea and the Secretariat for the impeccable organization of the latest visit by the Security Council to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

As the holding of presidential and national and provincial legislation elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo is two months away, my delegation welcomes the progress made by the National Independent Electoral Commission in the implementation of the electoral calendar. Côte d'Ivoire once again urges all Congolese political stakeholders, in particular the candidates to the various 23 December elections, to work towards creating an environment conducive to the holding of free, credible and peaceful elections in accordance with the recommendations of the joint communiqué of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union and the United Nations Security Council (SC/13430) issued following their twelfth annual joint consultative meeting, held in New York on 19 July. My delegation also notes the commitment of the Congolese authorities to hold transparent elections within the necessary time frame and to ensure their financing.

Nevertheless, my delegation believes that despite the progress made in implementing the electoral calendar, the lack of consensus on the use of voting machines and the security situation in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo remain matters of concern. Concerning the issue of voting machines, Côte d'Ivoire regrets the persistent divergent views among Congolese actors. My delegation therefore encourages the main political actors to engage in constructive dialogue without delay so as to reach consensus on that issue. With regard to the security situation, its deterioration, which is linked to the activities of armed groups in the provinces of Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, Tanganyika and Haut-Uélé, and the consequent deterioration of the humanitarian situation in those regions are factors likely to destroy any hope of restoring lasting peace, which is a prerequisite for development. My delegation therefore urges MONUSCO to spare no effort to ensure the protection of civilians and strengthen its joint operations with the Congolese armed forces in order to respond to the threats posed by those armed groups.

Côte d'Ivoire also welcomes the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the entire MONUSCO staff, as well as the relevant agencies of the United Nations system, regional and international organizations and all partners supporting the Democratic Republic of the Congo. My delegation shares the hope that the visit by the Security Council to the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 5 to 7 October will make a significant contribution to resolving remaining differences among stakeholders with regard to the holding of free, credible and peaceful elections on 23 December

With regard to the Great Lakes region, my delegation welcomes the progress made in the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, signed in Addis Ababa. Despite the progress made, the prospects for achieving lasting peace and security in the Great Lakes region continue to face major political and humanitarian challenges within a complex security environment. In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire appreciates the work of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Southern African Development Community, the East African Community and the Economic Community of Central African States, in synergy with the African Union and the United Nations, with a view to providing appropriate responses to the challenges I mentioned. My country encourages the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to pursue his efforts to implement the Addis Ababa Framework Agreement and supports addressing the priorities identified together with the leaders of the signatory countries and the Secretary-General, with a view towards implementing paragraph 24 of resolution 2389 (2017).

The Addis Ababa Framework Agreement outlines the key national, regional and international measures required to end the cycles of persistent violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region. The countries of the Great Lakes region, regional organizations and the international community continue to dispose of a fitting cooperative framework with which they can concertedly tackle the structural causes of instability in the region. Côte d'Ivoire therefore calls on the United Nations and the entire international community to increase their support for the effective implementation of the Framework Agreement, which is necessary to bring about peace and stability in that part of the African continent.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to begin by extending my thanks to our briefers, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui and Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Said Djinnit, for their comprehensive briefings. Allow me also to thank the Congolese authorities for their hospitality during our visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I would like to thank representatives of the Secretariat, especially the Security Council Affairs Division and the Department of Safety and Security, for the excellent arrangements made for the Security Council visit. We also express our gratitude to our colleagues from France, Bolivia and Equatorial Guinea for the fruitful cooperation and our discussions.

The visit was very timely and extremely valuable. The experience gained thanks to the trip to Kinshasa leaves no doubt that the Congolese people want free and fair elections, and they deserve it. Poland reiterates its call on the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to organize a truly inclusive and transparent electoral process. The upcoming presidential, national and provincial legislative elections mark a historic opportunity to initiate a period of peaceful transition and constitute a move to another stage of needed reforms. Building trust among all political and social actors remains a precondition for the establishment of an environment conducive to credible elections. In that regard, it is important to ensure a comprehensive political consensus on outstanding issues, mainly the use of voting machines and the voter register. We encourage the Government to pursue dialogue, fully implement the confidence-building measures contained in the Saint-Sylvestre agreement of 31 December 2016 and ensure a level playing field for all the parties. Needless to say, respect for fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly, is crucial for a democratic transition of power and the stability of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

At the same time, Poland encourages all political actors, as well as the representatives of civil society, to take ownership of the political process and truly become involved in electoral preparations. In that regard, Poland would also like to highlight the role of women, who represent an extraordinary human capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Fair and safe participation in the ongoing political process should be assured for them. They deserve a chance to get more involved politically in the electoral process. I was impressed by their enthusiasm and commitment in that regard. I also want to take this opportunity to underline the importance and visibility of the initiative of the Congolese people. They can be especially proud that one of their citizens, Dr. Denis Mukwege, shared this year's Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to put an end to the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict.

Bearing in mind the security situation as well as the increase in the activities of armed groups in various provinces, we value the engagement of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in

the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in providing protection to civilians on the ground and its efforts to mitigate the risks linked to the electoral process. Poland would like to express its appreciation of and full support for the joint work of Special Representative Leila Zerrougui and Special Envoy Said Djinnit, as well as the men and women of MONUSCO. Having noted the Government's decision to fully fund the electoral process, we encourage the authorities to take advantage of MONUSCO's readiness to provide technical and logistical support to the Independent National Electoral Commission.

The Great Lakes region continue to face persistent and significant political and security challenges. The root causes of instability continue to plague the region. While we appreciate the efforts that have been made so far, Poland encourages all the signatories to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region to demonstrate greater political will and accelerate the implementation of that commitment. The political situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has a significant impact on the stability of Central and sub-Saharan Africa. Strong cooperation between the regional and international organizations involved in support of the political process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo should be maintained as a matter of priority. In conclusion, let me stress that the forthcoming elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo should represent a crucial step on the path to lasting security and a better future for the Congolese people and the entire Central African region.

Mr. Yao Shaojun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China would like to thank Special Representative Zerrougui and Special Envoy Djnnit for their briefings.

Members of the Council recently visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo, enabling us to gain a first-hand and more in-depth understanding of the situation in the country. Through that visit, we have come to realize that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is firmly determined to take ownership of the process for maintaining international peace and stability and has achieved good progress in election preparations, the political process and the governance of the Kasai region. It is the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo who best understand the situation they face and the steps they want to take. The Council and the international community should fully respect and acknowledge the desires and efforts of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and further encourage them to realize their potential and take on the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and stability. Meanwhile, the international community should continue to provide the necessary assistance, based on the country's needs.

First, we must push for further dialogue and communication among all parties in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the effective implementation of the political agreements reached on 31 December 2016 and the smooth holding of elections. Secondly, we must bring the role of the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other regional and subregional organizations fully into play, enhance regional coordination, effectively implement the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region and focus on addressing the problem of armed groups in order to promote regional peace and stability. Thirdly, we must improve the efficiency of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and enhance consultations with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to improve MONUSCO's fulfilment of its mandate. Fourthly, we must further expand the humanitarian relief efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and help control Ebola.

As always, China is firmly committed to the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to the United Nations peacekeeping efforts there. We have provided the country with humanitarian assistance such as medical supplies and food and are actively engaged in its economic and social development. China is ready to join hands with the international community and to continue to play a constructive role in supporting the Democratic Republic of the Congo in taking ownership of the responsibility for its national peace, stability and development.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and Mr. Said Djinnit, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, for their comprehensive briefings on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and on the process of implementing the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. We also very grateful to all of the staff

of the Secretariat and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), as well as the other United Nations agencies that helped us to carry out a very successful and important visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

During our time in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, all the members of the Council expressed the hope that the timely holding of elections on 23 December will help to reduce the country's political tensions and stabilize the situation there. As we all had the opportunity to see for ourselves, the technical and legislative preparations for the December elections are proceeding in accordance with the electoral calendar established by the Independent National Electoral Commission. It is important to note that the electoral rolls were audited under the auspices of the International Organization of la Francophonie and a final version from which repetitions and inaccuracies had been removed was published in September.

We welcome the fact that half of the country's political parties have already signed on to the electoral code of conduct. The election has also been advanced by the publication of the final list of registered candidates. We urge the opposition forces to abandon their negative agendas, take an active part in the election campaign and not expect the Security Council to evaluate the decisions of the Congolese courts. At this important stage it would be unacceptable and irresponsible, in terms of the future of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to try to sway the situation. That also particularly applies to the issue of bringing in electronic machines for printing ballots, which is well under way, as we were able to see for ourselves.

At the same time, however, we call on the leadership of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to make additional efforts to build confidence among the main political forces in the country. As we understand it, the logistical preparations for the elections are already being carried out by the Independent National Electoral Commission. We agree that in order to avoid disruptions during the electoral process, it will be essential to ensure its sustainable financing. We respect the decision of the Congolese Government to rely largely on its own resources in that regard, while at the same time we want to draw attention to the logistical capacities of MONUSCO, which is ready to contribute to the efforts of the authorities at any time. However, MONUSCO's role in organizing and holding the elections should not go beyond the mandate outlined in resolution 2409 (2018). The protection of civilians in the context of the elections must be carried out with full respect for the basic principles of peacekeeping and without interfering in Kinshasa's internal affairs.

The elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are not a panacea in themselves. We must focus on the social and economic agenda and on resolving the underlying reasons for the crisis, while not forgetting how important it is to continue countering the illegal armed groups in the eastern areas of the country, which are still a threat to the civilian population and one that is capable of destabilizing the Great Lakes region. We are certain that this last issue should be considered the chief indicator of the country's stability and that decisions on the prospects and time frame for MONUSCO's withdrawal should depend on how it develops, since the Mission's main function is rectifying the security situation.

It is impossible to stabilize the situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo by military means alone. The implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region will have to continue in the eastern and Great Lakes regions, as will the provision of assistance to State authorities and the restoration of social institutions in the parts of the country that have been liberated from the rebels. We should not fail to note the significant progress that has been made in implementing the Framework's provisions. We welcome the launch of the mechanism for repatriating former combatants, which is unquestionably bringing positive momentum to relations between the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda. We sincerely hope that they will eventually be able to resolve that long-standing problem. It is encouraging that the problem of relocating the members of the South Sudan opposition who arrived in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in August 2016 is close to being resolved. We also want to note Mr. Djinnit's role in supporting the effort to attract private investors in order to boost economic cooperation among the countries of the region and strengthen peace and confidence there.

We agree with the view of the regional Powers that resolving the problems of illegal armed groups in the Great Lakes region could be helped by improving the effectiveness of MONUSCO's Intervention Brigade. In that regard, we believe it makes sense to focus their

main activity on the most problematic areas of the country. In conclusion, I would like to urge that we not relax our attention to ensuring peacekeepers' security and safety.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

We thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and Mr. Said Djinnit, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, for their briefings, and commend both of them for their efforts. With regard to Ms. Zerrougui's briefing, we want to highlight the ongoing progress and commitment demonstrated by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including through its publication of the voting rolls and the lists of candidates for the presidential, national legislative and provincial elections.

We also welcome the efforts to hold transparent, credible, inclusive and timely elections conducive to a peaceful transfer of Government. We commend the Government and the Independent National Electoral Commission for taking the decision to have the country finance its elections, which we see as evidence that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is on the right path and has the capacity to meet this major challenge. The international community must continue working with the country in that regard in order to strengthen the Government's capacity to deal with the various challenges surrounding the coordination and logistics for the upcoming elections while respecting its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

We reiterate that the parties must implement the confidence-building measures enshrined in the agreement of 31 December 2016, and we once again call for the agreement's full and complete implementation. The Government and the opposition must work together in order to make progress on this. In that regard, we commend regional organizations and the Special Envoy for their collaborative assistance in preparing for the elections, and we encourage them to continue their cooperation with the Independent National Electoral Commission.

We condemn the violence perpetrated by the armed groups in various parts of the country that are chiefly responsible for the deteriorating humanitarian situation. We encourage the Democratic Republic of the Congo to take new measures to put an end to the threat posed by the armed groups — complying, as appropriate, with both national and international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law — and with the support of MONUSCO, within the framework of its mandate. In that regard, we welcome MONUSCO's efforts and encourage it to continue its work in coordination with the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Lastly, we want to express our solidarity with the victims of the Ebola outbreak, and we commend the Congolese authorities, the international community, MONUSCO and the World Health Organization for their swift response to that humanitarian health crisis.

With regard to Mr. Djinnit's briefing, Bolivia supports the political initiatives and recommendations in the most recent report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2018/886). We welcome the cooperation between Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda in repatriating former combatants and their dependents, as well as the cooperation between the Congolese forces and MONUSCO.

We also commend the work of the Special Envoy and his Office and their efforts to reduce the illegal exploitation and trafficking of natural resources, which we consider one of the root causes of the conflicts in the region and which is why it will be crucial for the Congolese Administration to bring about structural change that can stabilize and strengthen the rule of law in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. If I may comment on that, the problem is not just the illegal exploitation or trafficking of natural resources, but also the immoral distribution of the profits they bring. As Mr. Djinnit put it so eloquently, it is essentially a country's own citizens — in this case those of the Democratic Republic of the Congo — who should be benefiting from those profits.

We also commend the Special Envoy's efforts regarding cooperation on the judicial, economic and humanitarian fronts and concerning gender equality and the empowerment of women. We especially applaud his role in building trust and in using his good offices in the region, including his support to

the inter-Burundian dialogue and his chairing of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security of the Southern African Development Community. We also commend his role in the ongoing dialogue with the African Union, among other measures in his purview.

Lastly, we call on the signatories to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework to focus their efforts and political will on making progress in its implementation, by reinforcing confidence-building measures through strategic partnerships and strengthening dialogue in close collaboration with regional and subregional partners.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Empole (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate the Plurinational State of Bolivia on its accession to the presidency of the Security Council, and to express our satisfaction at seeing you, Mr. President, presiding over the Council for the month of October. I would also like to recognize your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of the United States of America, and to thank her for her masterly leadership of the Council last month. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his commitment to my country and for his reports on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2018/882 and S/2018/886), which the Council has before it today.

First of all, I would like to convey to the Council the apologies of Mr. Ignace Gata Mavita Wa Lufuta, Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United Nations, who wanted to participate in this morning's meeting in person but was unfortunately prevented from doing so by some urgent business that came up during the Security Council delegation's recent visit to our country, which he accompanied.

The Security Council has just heard the briefing by Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), on the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/882), and Mr. Said Djinnit, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region. On behalf of my delegation, I would like not only to congratulate them on their excellent briefings but also to say how much the Democratic Republic of the Congo appreciates their tireless efforts to carry out their mandates as well as possible.

While we appreciate the thoroughness of the Secretary-General's report, I would still like to address some concerns raised in the report and in some Council members' statements regarding the areas of the electoral process; the political agreement of 31 December 2016 and measures for reducing tensions; MONUSCO and the Intervention Brigade in the electoral context; the security and humanitarian situation; and, lastly, peace, cooperation and stability in the Great Lakes region.

As we heard in many statements today, the electoral process has made a great deal of progress and is proceeding properly in accordance with the electoral calendar published by the Independent National Electoral Commission on 5 November 2017. As President Joseph Kabila Kabange of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has affirmed, our course towards elections on 23 December is irreversible. Following the publication on 19 September of the final list of candidates, and with less than 75 days to go before the elections are held, the Independent National Electoral Commission has been diligently pursuing a campaign to raise voters' awareness about the voting machines and how to use them, as well as recruiting polling officers and publishing the provisional voting rolls.

In order to enable voters from all social sectors to familiarize themselves with the machines that will be used for voting on election day on 23 December, the Electoral Commission has set them up in public places such as schools, ports, airports and villages, and in its local branches. The Commission is taking very seriously the concerns, fears and difficulties about the electoral process that have been raised by politicians and partners, particularly those related to the use of the voting machines, the transparency and credibility of the elections, logistics and inclusiveness.

Regarding the voting machine problem, we dare to hope that Council members' recent discussions in Kinshasa with the President of the Independent National Electoral Commission gave them a better understanding of this tool, which the Democratic Republic of the Congo will be using for the first time. However, I want to point out that the Democratic Republic of the Congo

had already provided the Council with explanations of its reasons for advocating the use of this technology, which are about saving money and time. Regardless of that, it has been certified that the machine merely prints out the ballot papers, and besides that, it prints only the choice made by the voter and nothing else. That was confirmed by the electoral assessment mission conducted in the Democratic Republic of the Congo between 5 and 7 September by the Electoral Commissions Forum of the countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which noted that

> "the voting machine helps to overcome the real challenges the country faces in terms of the logistical organization of the elections, including cost and timeliness".

The Forum also commended the Electoral Commission and encouraged it to continue its efforts to explain the voting machines and raise awareness about them among the population and the political stakeholders in order to prevent any false information in that regard. Moreover, for greater transparency, the machines were analysed and approved by experts from the British organization that was mentioned just now, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, which made some recommendations for measures for practical support. In the same effort to ensure transparency, the Electoral Commission is now working in collaboration with more than 130 international experts from MONUSCO as advisers.

With regard to the concerns about the elections' transparency and credibility, it should be pointed out that the International Organization of la Francophonie verified the electoral rolls between 6 and 26 May in Kinshasa, and the audit concluded that the electoral roll was by and large entirely inclusive, exhaustive, reliable and up-to-date. As is clearly noted in paragraph 6 of the report under consideration (S/2018/882), with the cleanup of the voter register, the Electoral Commission has removed from the rolls as many as 5,381,763 voters, in addition to 472,000 minors who will not be of voting age by the time of the elections on 23 December. From an initial figure of 46,057,894, therefore, the provisional electoral register now contains 40,287,385 voters.

With regard to logistics, we should emphasize that elections are matters of State sovereignty, and in that regard, the Congolese Government confirms its commitment to financing those elections with its own funds, taking into account the disbursement plan agreed with the Electoral Commission and specific needs. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has therefore opted not to request any financial and logistical support from partners. While we remain open on the issue, we would request support from partners only if absolutely necessary.

Based on all of this, we would like to reiterate the determination of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to hold, free, fair and credible elections in a peaceful atmosphere, using voting machines for simple, rapid and reliable voting.

In the view of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, some concerns that have been raised should cease to be of concern, as they no longer have any substance. That is especially the case with regard to worries about the elections' inclusiveness in the wake of announcements of the ineligibility of some candidates and about our measures for reducing tensions. As we have informed the Council more than once, the Congolese Government has established measures for building confidence and easing political tensions, as outlined in the 31 December 2016 agreement. In accordance with our laws, several prisoners, described as political prisoners, some of whom had been arrested for participating in insurrectionist movements, have been released by the justice system. A number of political actors who wished to do so have been able to return to the country, while others have freely chosen to remain abroad. Several television channels and radio stations that are in legal proceedings, some of which belong to the opposition, have reopened. In cases of individuals who have committed common law offences, they have been convicted in accordance with the law, following fair trials. That is the case with the so-called emblematic prisoners.

In paragraph 28 of resolution 2277 (2016), the Security Council rightly recalled that

> "future reconfigurations of MONUSCO and its mandate should be determined in consultation with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the basis of the evolution of the situation on the ground".

With that in mind, the Democratic Republic of the Congo considers that MONUSCO's specific role in support of security in the ongoing electoral process should be provided at the formal request of the Government and based on the priorities assigned to it in that regard. For its part, the Government has decided to establish a team

of experts to develop an election security map. It also decided on security for the presidential candidates.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo also supports the principle of increasing the operational capacity of the Intervention Brigade. It continues to believe that the drawdown of MONUSCO troops should begin with the troops deemed non-essential and that the Intervention Brigade contingent should be the last to leave Congolese territory. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo would like to reaffirm the position of SADC, according to which, when the forces deployed within MONUSCO are drawn down, it is important not to affect the capacity of the Rapid Intervention Brigade.

With regard to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, the Democratic Republic of the Congo again expresses its regret to note that the programme is still not among the strategic priorities of the current mandate of MONUSCO and, as a result, suffers from a lack of funding by partners.

Respect for, and the protection of, human rights and public freedoms are also a clear concern of the Government during the electoral period. The media space is open to all. Subject to respect for the laws and regulations of the country, public demonstrations have resumed throughout the territory. In that context, we must underline the successful holding of a meeting of the political opposition on Boulevard Triomphal in the municipality of Kasa-Vubu on Saturday, 29 September, during which no major incident was recorded. Congolese National Police officers supervised the demonstration with professionalism. In the interest of transparency, the Government, with the participation of civil society and the National Human Rights Commission, established two joint commissions of inquiry to identify human rights violations and breaches committed in the context of public demonstrations.

Regarding the case of the killing of two United Nations experts, the Government would like to note that, with the arrest in December 2017 of the alleged sponsor, Constantin Bulabula, it expects to be provided with additional elements by the team of the Special Prosecutor, Robert Petit, and the international commission of inquiry, in order to enable the Congolese judiciary to establish responsibility and punish the perpetrators.

The security situation is generally calm throughout the Democratic Republic of Congo. The 145 territories are under Government control, despite pockets of insecurity in some areas of North Kivu and South Kivu. The Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) continue their operations against all entrenched groups until their eradication, while, for its part, the National Police undertakes actions to fight against all forms of crime in the large cities. For now, the FARDC continues its offensive to neutralize the sporadic and asymmetrical terrorist attacks of the Allied Democratic Forces, as well as those of local armed groups known as the Mayi-Mayi. We would like to point out that the FARDC alone is fighting against all the armed groups without the support of MONUSCO.

Regarding stability in the Great Lakes region, in my delegation's view, in order for it to be sustainable, such stability must be dependent on respect for the commitments made under the various agreements to restore peace and security in that region, in particular, first, the 2006 Pact on Security, Stability and Development of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and its various protocols; secondly, the 2013 Addis Ababa Framework agreement; and, thirdly, the decisions of the eighth meeting of Heads of State and Government of the signatory countries of the Framework agreement, held in Brazzaville on 19 October 2017. For its part, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has always done its utmost to implement all the commitments that it made under those various agreements, including the recent decisions taken by the Heads of State of the region at the eighth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Framework agreement, which ordered the simultaneous and unconditional repatriation of fighters of the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda and former combatants of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), stationed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda, respectively. In addition, my country calls for due diligence in upholding their commitments on the part of the other States in the region, in particular certain neighbouring countries, with the support of the partners and guarantors of the Addis Ababa Framework agreement.

With regard to the specific situation of former M-23 combatants, the Democratic Republic of the Congo regrets that, in Ngoma, Rwanda, on 13 September, the leadership of the former M-23 combatants, in particular Pastor Runiga, openly and violently attacked those to be repatriated to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in front of representatives of the guarantors, namely,

SADC, the United Nations and the ICGLR, including the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, thereby obstructing the implementation of the decisions of the Heads of State taken on 19 October 2017.

The Government remains mobilized on the issue of sexual violence and the recruitment of children. During the first half of this year, following the joint communiqué of 30 March 2013 signed between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations, the Government implemented a certain number of measures to prevent and combat sexual violence. Such measures related to training recruitment officers of the FARDC, the Congolese National Police and military judges on proficiency in the operational standards with regard to age assessment and a plan of action to combat sexual violence of the FARDC, as well as raising awareness among the population. In implementation of the 2014 FARDC plan of action to combat sexual violence, the FARDC commission organized four workshops in several cities in the country, including Goma, Kananga, Tshikapa and Lubumbashi, on the operational standards for evaluating age and combating sexual violence. Those training sessions were geared towards the recruitment officers of the FARDC and the Congolese National Police. There were a total of 40 participants at each site. The training courses had a twofold objective, namely, to avoid the recruitment of anyone under 18 years of age within the FARDC and to prevent the commission of any act of sexual violence, by providing recruitment officers with the capacity to train recruits and other soldiers. The training courses took place between February and July. A similar training course will soon take place in other cities, including Kinshasa and Kalemie.

It should be noted that the Operational Military Court is preparing to convene the Walikale trial, which will involve 380 people who were victims of direct or indirect rape by the militia leaders Séraphin Nzitonda, known as Lionceau, and Ntabo Taberi, known as Cheka, as well as their men. With the support of our partners, the construction of a courtroom and a fortified detention facility have already been completed. We are waiting only for the transfer of the defendants to begin the trial. It should also be noted that the bill on responsibility for victims of sexual violence was adopted by the sociocultural committee of the Senate on 14 June, on the eve of the closure of the March parliamentary session, and should be adopted by the plenary at the current session.

The humanitarian situation in the Kasai provinces following the disturbances of public order and abuses perpetrated by the Kamuina Nsapu militia has improved significantly. There are some repercussions from the meeting on peace, reconciliation and development, held by the Government in Kasai in September 2017 and presided over by the Head of State, Mr. Joseph Kabila Kabange. That respite allowed for the reopening of the borders with Angola for a voluntary and peaceful return of Congolese nationals who had found refuge in that neighbouring country. Such improvement is affirmed by the July report of the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

With regard to the Ebola virus haemorrhagic fever, it must be said that the Democratic Republic of the Congo has experienced two simultaneous epidemics of that haemorrhagic fever since April. We note that thanks to national expertise and with the support of international partners, represented by the World Health Organization, the African Union, the United Nations and non-governmental health organizations, the Government response made it possible to contain and control the disease and the humanitarian situation of affected persons.

To date, the chain of transmission in Mandima has been completely brought under control in less than four weeks, with 4,207 people vaccinated in Mabalako. All the new cases reported since the end of August are the result of resistance in the Ndindi neighbourhood of Beni. Despite the persistent elevated risk, the situation in Butembo is under control. The city of Beni, however, continues to be the main centre of the epidemic so far, where the situation remains worrisome due to the security situation. Due to that security emergency, a new strategy has been adopted to contain the epidemic in Beni. Nevertheless, if people fully collaborate with the response teams, we can project an end to the epidemic by the end of October.

Still on the Ebola epidemic, we note the holding of a meeting of East African Sates in Entebbe, Uganda, from 2 to 4 October, with most participants attending from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Burundi, South Sudan, Tanzania, Kenya and Rwanda. The goal of the meeting was to improve cross-border collaboration in monitoring the virus and in preparing for, and responding to, emergency situations in East

Africa. The discussions focussed mainly on the measures to be taken in order to avoid the spread of the Ebola pandemic, which is currently raging in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri. Participating countries worked on developing an action plan to bolster their cross-border monitoring activities, preparation for emergencies and a response mechanism for combating the disease by defining clear roles and responsibilities for the various participants. In order to keep the people and partners better informed on Ebola-related developments, the Ministry of Public Health provides a daily epidemiological update on the virus.

I would be remiss if I did not thank all who have committed to be at our side in ensuring lasting peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I would like to thank in particular the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the African Union for their essential role in maintaining peace in our region. I salute and pay tribute to the memory of all the Blue Helmets who have lost their lives so that peace can return to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Finally, I thank the United Nations, and especially the members of the Security Council for their ongoing attention to the situation in my country and for visiting my country in a show of solidarity at this critical time in its history in order to experience at first-hand the deep-seated reality taking place ahead of the 23 December elections.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.